



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

Opening Statement
Chairman Robert C. Byrd
Markup of FY 2009 Homeland Security Appropriations bill
June 18, 2008

Good Morning. Today, we begin the fiscal year 2009 appropriations process. The Subcommittee has before it the fiscal year 2009 Homeland Security Appropriations bill. The Full Committee is scheduled to mark up this bill and the Commerce, Justice, Science bill tomorrow at 2pm.

It has now been five years since the Department of Homeland Security was established. Since then, I have pressed the President and the Congress to provide the Department with the resources that it needs to fulfill its critical missions.

This Subcommittee, on a bipartisan basis, has added funding to the President's request all five years, and we will do so again this year.

In February, the Director of National Intelligence released the Annual Threat Assessment. The Director confirmed that Al-Qaeda has regrouped in Pakistan and that terrorists continue to pose significant threats to the United States. According to the threat assessment, terrorists are likely to continue to focus on prominent infrastructure targets with the goal of producing mass casualties and significant economic aftershocks. In addition, the Department continues to believe that the aviation sector is at a high risk of attack.

Based on these threats, I am disappointed that the President proposes a flat budget for the Department. The President seeks \$38.85 billion, an increase of two-tenths of one percent above fiscal year 2008.

I am particularly troubled by the President's proposal to cut first responder grants by 48 percent or \$2 billion. Cutting funding for State and local police and fire and emergency medical personnel is not the solution to the terrorist threat that the Administration has identified. Nor is it the solution to the failure to respond to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

The bill that is before the Subcommittee totals \$41.3 billion, an increase of \$2.5 billion above the President's request and an increase of \$2.6 billion, or six percent, above fiscal year 2008.

For border security, the bill includes requested funds to hire 2,200 new Border Patrol agents. The bill also includes requested funding of \$775 million for border fencing, infrastructure, and technology. While the President dedicates significant resources to border security, the Department's proposal is neither comprehensive nor coordinated. The bill adds funding above the request for 143 additional Customs officers. We add \$160 million to continue our initiative to deport, upon completion of their prison sentences, the most violent of the estimated 400,000 illegal aliens who currently reside in Federal, State, and local prisons. We add \$60 million to hire 125 additional agents involved in worksite enforcement and for 1,400 additional detention beds. Since 2004, we have increased the number of border patrol agents from 12,319 to over 20,000, so we include funding to insure that there is proper training and oversight to maintain the integrity of these programs.

The Department's own 2006 fire service needs assessment revealed that fire departments have only enough portable radios to equip an estimated 36 percent of emergency responders on a shift and that only 12 percent of fire departments can handle even a small incident involving chemical or biological agents. The Department estimates that only 31 percent of urban areas are prepared to deal with a major disaster.

Cutting funding by 48 percent will not address these problems. Therefore, the bill that is before the Subcommittee restores the first responder, port security, transit security, emergency management, and fire grants programs to fiscal year 2008 levels.

In August of 2007, the President signed the 9/11 Act, but he did not request additional funding to implement the Act. The bill provides \$250 million above the request for the procurement of explosives detection systems at airports, for security at airport checkpoints, for air cargo security, and for additional rail inspectors.

For the Coast Guard, we increase funding by \$145 million above the request. Despite the incredible stresses that have been placed on the Coast Guard in a post-9/11 world, the size of the Coast Guard workforce has not grown significantly since 1975. The Coast Guard workforce is smaller than the New York City Police Department. The bill adds funding for 328 new positions, for additional coastal patrol boat hours, and for 36 additional 45-foot response boats.

The bill also includes a \$12 million increase above the request for enforcing chemical security standards and a \$25 million increase to improve cyber security, with a particular focus on helping the private sector cope with this evolving threat.

With this bill, we provide the Department with the resources it needs to cope with an evolving terrorist threat, to secure our borders and enforce our immigration laws, and to respond to natural disasters.

I thank Senator Cochran and all Members of the Subcommittee for their support.

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